



Presentation Survival School

Level #1 Basic Training

Breakout Session 135

Start with the Right Presentation Foundation

Create a Good Process for Development

Manage Collaborative Presentation Environments

Make Sound Technology Choices

What do you need to know for this session?

This basic training session assumes that you've been a part of the presentation design or delivery process and possess a general understanding of hardware and software tools used by today's presenters.

Session objectives:

- Understand how every presentation is just a well-told story
 - Learn some new ways to approach the presentation content assembly process
 - Case study examples will give you some fresh ideas in leveraging your own presentation software
 - Gain balance in understanding the role and issues of your supporting technologies
 - Provide some insight into handling presentations developed by teams
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Session Coach

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Jim Endicott is a nationally-recognized consultant and coach focusing on professional presentation content, design and development. His articles appear in PRESENTATIONS magazine as well as many industry websites and contain valuable insights for creating professional business presentation content and graphics. Distinction, Jim's Portland, Oregon-based consulting and design business, helps organizations effectively leverage their presentations from initial concept to final delivery. Distinction's team has supported clients such as Kemper Funds, Microsoft, PaineWebber, Covey Leadership, Smith Barney, Dale Carnegie, Charles Schwab, US Bank as well as many smaller organizations trying to enhance the professional impact of their business communication tools.

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1. The Presentation Planning Process

It's pretty easy these days to insert objects on screen, make text move or create a quick chart. The tough part is crafting a compelling presentation message that transcends the dependency we frequently place on our presentation screens to carry the day. Sexy graphics will never make up for thin content or tentative delivery skills. Good presentations are a balance of several key things working in concert to connect with our audiences at different levels. At their essence, the very best presentations are nothing more or less than a well-told story. The art of storytelling is centuries old but at its core are all the tools that can make an average presenting exceptional.

The Art of Storytelling

“Once upon a time...”

Setting a relevant context for the audience as well as anticipation for the storyline to follow is mission-critical to our success. The opening five minutes of our presentation will create interest and engagement or apathy. We set expectations in several ways.

Personal introduction. A brief personal introduction is the opportunity for the audience to sense how your personal background is one they can relate to. During this time their relational filters will be trying to assess speaker connectivity issues like, honesty, openness, formality and trustworthiness. Bottom line - can they relate to you?

Compelling starts. Personal stories, experiences, statistics – all tied back to the theme create the interest.

Agenda slides. Our audiences are typically different from a movie theater audience. They want to know where you're going to be taking them and why it's relevant to them. The level of direction provided will depend on your audience.

“...and they ran as fast as their legs could take them but the dragon closed the distance”

It's hard to imagine any kind of good storybook without illustrations. Your presentation images become the supporting visualization of the story. (Not the story itself)

Good illustrations are always built on a compelling storyline, not vise-versa. Get your presentation message well thought out before you begin or you will find that you are delivering message around graphics, not graphics around message.

Choose graphics wisely. Tell as little as you feel comfortable telling visually. Be aware that the more that is on screen, the more you will compete for attention with your presentation. Although that might be the objective for some presenters, it's not what great presentations are made of.

“...and the dragon turned and looked at them right in the eye”

I doubt we'll ever send our kids to the Internet instead of the local library to hear a storyteller. The reason is that a good storyteller uses their body language and eye contact to make a connection.

Discover and practice and comfortable delivery style. We will spend a lifetime fine-tuning the art of presenting because we are always learning. Establish relationship not only with your words but with your eyes as well.

“...the village was saved and they lived happily ever after!”

Good presentations don't end because we ran out of slides. They end because we've orchestrated a practiced and polished conclusion that helps pull the pieces together for our audience.

Don't underestimate the power of the close. Be sure not to jam so much content into your presentation that you don't have time to deliver a comfortable, well-paced 5-minute summary and conclusion.

Here's a presentation process that can create focus to your presentation.

Presentation Planner

STEP 1:

Background Information

A little homework now will save you a ton of grief later. What is the context of the presentations going on around you? How much time you have will directly how you approach content development and the medium you choose will determine the techniques that will be used to tell your story.

Date/time: _____

Title or theme: _____

Subtitle: _____

Length of presentation

Minutes: _____

Primary presentation medium

Slides, Overheads, Electronic, Other: _____

Do you have a back-up medium planned?

No, Yes: _____

Handouts required? (HANDOUT more than you say, SAY more than you PROJECT)

No, Yes: _____

STEP 2:

Audience to Consider

You've heard this before. You can't develop meaningful content unless you understand the "filters" and audience perceptions that will interpret what you have to say. It may make perfect sense to you and be totally misunderstood by your audience. Your casual use of clipart could come across as unprofessional. Consider your audience.

Information gathering ideas

Pre-surveying Phone interviews Visit web sites Understand affiliated associations Talk to previous speakers

Describe your audience

(Engineers, executives, high tech, low tech, conservative...)

What are their expectations? How can you exceed them?

Anticipated questions or challenges?

If you just delivered the “perfect” presentation, what would your target audience do with the information you just conveyed?

STEP 3:

Begin with the end in mind

Creating the conclusion to your presentation first will act as a constant guide to ensure your content creates a straight line of logic to your conclusion. Can you even identify those key points or are they lost in a sea of

Bottom-line message

If they will only remember 3 or 4 things from your presentation, what would you want them to be?

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

Can't think of less than 8 or 10? Guess what. Your audience may not remember any of them.

STEP 4:

Create an outline

However you choose to do an outline, the important point is that there are some basic approaches to content design that can guide the creation of an effective presentation. Here are a few:

- 1) Personal introduction highlights: (Display a clean, graphically rich title slide)

- 2) Opening remarks/stories: (Pose a question, engage them on a topic... get them thinking.)

- 3) Agenda slide: (Telling ‘em what you’re going to tell them can take on many forms)

- A _____
- B _____
- C _____
- D _____
- E _____

Too many points in your agenda? Maybe you’re just trying to cover too much in this presentation.

Hope you have some good handouts! Time for another sanity check. Does this agenda reflect a bulls-eye hit on your audience? Is it appropriate for the time you have?

- 4) Basic presentation content and flow:

Laying your content out in the presentation software outliner, (if only the titles) will give you a clear picture of the logical progression of your message. This part can be tough for some. Have someone that is outside of the presentation process take a look and give you an objective opinion. If it doesn’t connect well for them it probably won’t for your audience.

A) Outline the flow so it concludes with the summary or conclusion slides you've already created

B) Chart/supporting data to obtain:

A _____
B _____
C _____
D _____

C) Stories/analogs to add personalization to the presentation:

A _____
B _____

D) Audience interaction ideas:

Some presentations don't lend themselves to this but where possible, consider questions to pose to your audience, personal experiences that they've had that support the topic, observations they have from which the group would benefit.

A _____
B _____

STEP 5:

Drop in graphical relief

This area is essential to a good presentation. Wherever possible, scrutinize your text information to see what text can be better represented by graphical images, animation builds, photographs & video integration. The very best presenters eliminate text and underscore the message themselves or use well-chosen graphics and movement.

What elements are available to you to graphically "flavor" the message & reduce text descriptions?

Clip art (use tastefully and consider your audience) _____
Scanned images (scan appropriately) _____
Sound (opening music/ voice-over reinforcement) _____
Video (video bites to underscore message) _____
Animation effects to aid understanding _____
Use of company logo (theirs or yours) _____
Screen captures (emulating look and feel) _____
Internet resources (live or simulated) _____
Other ideas? _____

STEP 6:

End with a conclusion or action

Just a reminder. Go back to Step 3 and see if your presentation flow has driven up to your 'Begin with the End in Mind' summary statements. If it hasn't, go back and rework the flow or the audience will not understand how you got to your conclusion.

Closing comments to your audience: (paraphrase here)_____

What do you want your audience to do with the information you've given them? Tell them.
(ie. "In your very next presentation I want you to try one new concept introduced today.")

Presentation feedback mechanism

Evaluation forms

Email address to send feedback directly to you

"Personal evaluator" in the room

Time scheduled to follow-up with audience members

Presentation leave-behinds

Handouts of presentation slides

Handouts with specific descriptions omitted for note taking incentive

Printed information

Don't forget contact information for you

Effective team collaboration

When presentation development is a team effort consider these important things.

Consistent corporate template standards

Select a gatekeeper for graphical standards

Provide a final review for all contributors to ensure context of final message

Managing your supporting technologies

Technology should become a seamless and near-invisible assistant that neither upstages, not interrupts.

Notes:

I trust this has been an informative session for you. Crafting a solid presentation “story”, illustrating it with relevant and interesting imagery, and delivering it with impact are at the heart of our success. Because of the number of people who are now involved with presentation development, we need to create a helpful process to guide these efforts. We can then invest in practicing our presentations so we can deliver them with more confidence and comfort.

Thank you for attending this session. If you have other questions you'd like to ask Jim Endicott and did not get a chance, please email those to him at jim.endicott@distinction-services.com.



Jim Endicott

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Forging a presenter-designer partnership that succeeds

I'm a golf hack, so I was glued to my television during the British Open tournament this July. It was fun watching the pros, even when they were slicing a drive into the visitors gallery. But what really caught my attention this time was the relationship between the caddies and the pro golfers. A caddy is not just a lackey who carries the clubs from hole to hole — far from it. Especially on the green, there's a real partnership there. The caddy offers expert advice on which club to use, how to play a difficult shot out of the rough, or where a green might break.

In the tournament, one player had a commanding lead going into the last hole; a mediocre performance was all he needed to win. But instead of playing it safe, the pro grabbed his driver — a poor club selection — and proceeded to the tee. You think the caddy's role is insignificant? His failure to

collaborate at that critical moment cost the pro the honor of winning the prestigious British Open (and the caddy a huge payday).

This isn't so different from the relationship between presenters and their colleagues in the graphics department. Traditionally, we think of presentation design as supporting the presenter in a passive kind of way: The designers take what they're given, clean it up a bit, maybe throw in a little clip art, and they're done. But if this is how you view the process, you (and your company) are in danger of losing the tournament. The stakes for presenting are too high these days; they dictate a new role for presenter and designer.

How do designers see their role?

I frequently hear graphics departments complain that the corporate presenters they support dump on them with little notice and give them outrageously little time to develop a project. Having worked in a corporate environment myself, I know this doesn't need to be the norm. Many graphics departments put themselves into a react-and-respond mode, seeing themselves only as computer jockeys.

If that's how it is in your company, do what you can to expand the designers' vision of their responsibility in the presentation process. Consider extending their roles (with training) to be not only presentation designers, but content consultants as well. This gives your message an essential sanity check. We have PR specialists, media specialists and Web specialists — why not help the designers develop a core competence in the areas of message design and multimedia integration for presentations? As their skills develop, with your

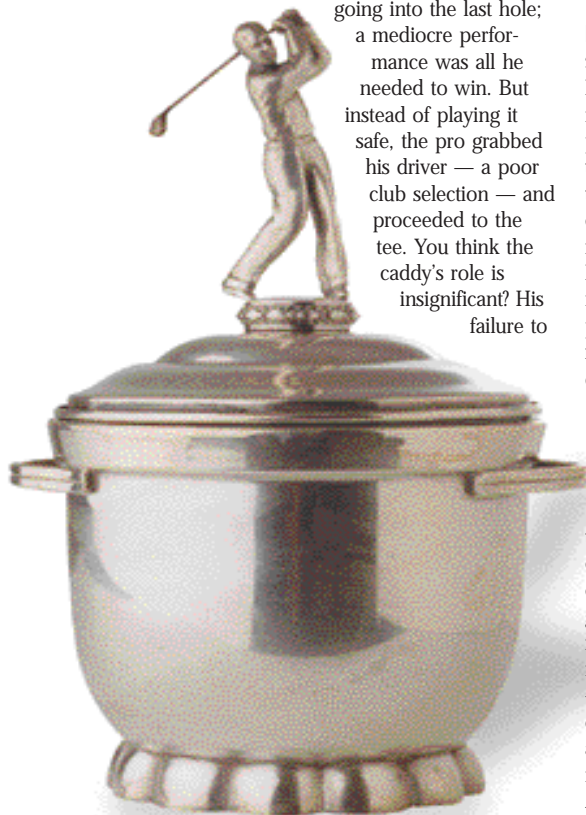
encouragement, their value will increase dramatically.

Create a worksheet for presentation design

The communication process for presentations is frequently informal and rarely documented. For this reason, encourage the design department to create a design worksheet for use with every presentation project. Be sure it includes the target audience, a description of the presentation's content, a schedule or timetable, the supporting technology the presentation will be used with, and the distribution medium (at kiosk at a trade show? via a Web site?).

Target audience. Seldom do presentations fall into the one-size-fits-all category — they're usually tailored to fit a specific audience. This can have far-reaching implications. For example, a senior staff briefing had better be short, packed with summary information, and prefaced with a section that specifies what listeners should do with the data. (Decision-makers instinctively want to evaluate and take action; if the talk is purely informational, tell them so up front.)

The target audience's industry will influence the design, maybe even down to the color selection. For a conservative industry such as a bank or a brokerage, traditional blues might work best, along with a focus on charts as a communication tool. A high-technology audience, on the other hand, expects more creative graphic treatments that effectively leverage the medium. Nonprofit organizations will recoil from anything that smacks of "flash," while a large-venue audience requires a readable typeface and font size — one that works for a crowd of 2,500 people, like the sans-serif Arial.





Questions for the designer to ask:

- Describe the target audience for this project. What is its professional or educational background — corporate executives? trade show attendees? conservative? high-tech?
- What is the audience's expectation for your presentation?
- What's the presentation room environment?

Content. Knowing the content up front is essential. Sometimes a presenter asks a designer to base a presentation on one they've seen somewhere else. Unless the designer asks enough questions to decode that experience, the final presentation will miss the mark. The mix of text to charts, graphics and photos is important — but a design *consultant* is expected to bring his or her expertise to the equation, offering creative options for the client that reframe the content in graphical terms. If designers simply take text information and clean up the typos, they're missing one of the greatest areas of assistance they can provide: Helping presenters use well-thought-out images to describe text information.

Questions for the designer to ask:

- Does the basic content include text, graphics, charts, sound files, digital video, animation?
- Does it require interactivity, or a simple linear approach?
- What are the presentation's three mission-critical messages?
- What is the anticipated length of the presentation?
- How does the presenter like to stage information — by mouse clicks, or automatic reveals?

Schedule. Production deadlines are a common source of conflict between presenter and designer, so this might be a difficult area to change. Becoming more proactive and less reactive is a critical first step in gaining control. Try setting up a once-a-month meeting between presenter and designer to discuss projects coming up in the next month. A nice side benefit is that presenters will begin to see the graphics department as a part-

ner in the process, not simply a necessary evil to deal with in getting presentations done.

Questions for the designer to ask:

- When will the presentation be delivered before an audience?
- When will its initial content be available for the designer to review?
- When will the presenter deliver the first draft?
- Whose approval is required and at what stages of the process?
- Can the designer see the presenter in action from time to time?

Supporting technology. Designers should look hard at the computer or projector the final presentation will depend on. It's easy to create a presentation that goes beyond the capacity of the computer it's supposed to be played on, and to create graphics that exceed the resolution of an electronic projector. Many a good presentation has looked pretty pathetic when played back on an old laptop computer.

Questions for the designer to ask:

- What's the presentation computer's type and speed?
- What's the resolution of the electronic projector?
- Does the presentation require sound?
- Can video be better accommodated through direct playback from VCR to projector, instead of digitizing the video for computer playback?

Distribution requirements. Often designers find out too late the presentation's ultimate objective. Perhaps the presenter wants the show put up on the Web for viewing after it's been delivered — in which case the designer had better be prepared to dumb down the animation and transitions to accommodate Web delivery. Just want to download it? The designer should decide what the threshold of pain is in download file size, and look at compression utilities to get the presentation to that point. Even a simple-sounding CD-ROM is not something to throw in at the last minute. I once had a client tell me (after the fact) that he wanted

to distribute his presentation at a trade show — a presentation that was too big to fit on a disc, and that used a different version of PowerPoint than most of his audience would have access to.

Questions for the designer to ask:

- Where will the presentation be viewed?
- Will it be distributed, and to whom?
- In what form will it be distributed — a Web site? a CD-ROM?
- If it's going out electronically, what can be assumed about the audience's supporting computer and software?

Why should the presenter listen to the designer?

Just as a pro golfer ignores the caddy's advice at his or her peril, it would be crazy for presenters not to listen to their presentation consultants. Consultants are not paid to let clients suffer the consequences of their poor choices. A designer should challenge a presenter's excessive use of text and recommend particular kinds of graphics, and also look for opportunities to use the media in some creative new way. The designer should find the courage to tell the presenter (and provide professional alternatives) when an important presentation is marred by gratuitous clip art or innocuous sound effects.

The way I see it, presenters and designers have two choices: Continue to feel victimized by an ineffectual presentation-design process, or forge a partnership that adds more value to the designer's contribution. Being a presentation lackey is not much fun. Being a presentation *partner* is infinitely more enjoyable. Being an effective *team* is even better. ■





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4 techniques to guarantee you're a terrible presenter

As you all know, the road to the top isn't an easy one. Getting there can be like climbing one of those rope ladders that dangles from a dangerous precipice, and if you're in high-tech, it's even tougher. Simply hanging on to the thing suddenly becomes as important as actually

fired, collect unemployment and move to Minnesota and fish for walleye?

If either is the case, here are guidelines for delivering a terrible, job-destroying presentation. Follow this advice and you're sure to fail the next time you stand in front of an audience.

Finally, there is a direct correlation between fear and preparation. I've proven to myself time and time again that my confidence and composure in presenting to an audience, especially large ones, is in direct correlation to my comfort level with the technology I'm using and my grasp of the information

I'm presenting. Add to this the critical preparation step of running through your presentation a million times so that your interaction with the audience takes on a conversational tone, and you might end up feeling downright comfortable.

You see, audiences want desperately for



trying to get somewhere.

As the business environment becomes ever more frantic, noisy and information-intensive, the ability to create and deliver an effective presentation to peers and customers has become more important than ever. The attitude of "my presentations are good enough" just doesn't cut it today. Not only have audience expectations changed dramatically over the past few years, but corporations increasingly look at a person's presentation skills when it's time to dole out promotions. As a presentation consultant, I know this is true.

But what if you're tired of the rat race and just want to stay where you are in the corporate hierarchy, or better yet, to get

1. Spend as little time preparing as possible.

The problem with doing any preparation at all is that it severely undermines the efforts of people trying to sabotage their careers. In addition to causing you to miss that 2:30 tee time, it has the side effect of providing additional insight into the subject matter, which in turn allows you to better anticipate questions that will be posed. Also, credibility with your audience is dramatically enhanced when you move crisply and seamlessly through your presentation. Additional practice will tend to keep you more on track and less apt to drill down into content not critical to your key points. Unfortunately, this can only impress those who are in attendance.

us to succeed. Nothing makes them feel more uncomfortable than to experience a presenter who is clearly ill-prepared and struggling to keep their attention. So, if you're serious about tanking your career, instead of running through your presentation five times, just *scan* your notes before you take the stage. With any luck, you'll never be invited back.

2. Try to make your presentation look like everyone else's.

This may be one of the easier steps to follow in your journey to personal freedom. As a matter of fact, this is almost intuitive. The software program you're probably using has provided some built-in assistance. Find a template that looks like one you've seen a thou-



If you want a bad presentation, create bad slides.

sand other presenters use, then use it yourself. That way your corporate identity will become generic and boring, too. If you must use a logo, by all means try to find one that is really jaggy. The best way to do this is to import an EPS logo created specifically for PostScript print reproduction and use it in your electronic presentations. This will ensure your logo is totally illegible. Even if they do manage to read it, it will be clear to everyone that your presentation is an afterthought. After all, how many times have you seen a bad logo used in your company brochures or videos? Let me take a stab at this... how about never?

So by using a poor reproduction of your logo in your presentation, you will send a clear signal that it was the best you could throw together in the time you had, therefore reinforcing Step 1, total lack of preparation. Now you're on a roll. Your manager is coming under some pressure to alter your employment status, so you're halfway there. I'm never one to leave much to chance, though. If there's any doubt that your use of an ill-chosen template might have eluded your peers, I suggest forgetting the stock templates altogether and forging full steam ahead into a...custom background design. Talk about freedom. You now have the opportunity to

leverage 16.8 million colors in the design of your presentation. Bright reds, greens, browns or maybe just plain white—anything goes. Because your presentation software has assured you that anyone can create a dynamic and powerful presentation, there's really no point in becoming pre-occupied with what's appropriate and what's not. Let 'er rip!

3. Try to cram as much stuff on each slide as possible.

One of the best ways to totally confuse and disorient your audience is to place as much text and as many meaningless graphics on each of your screens as possible. Because an audience's natural inclination is to read what's on the screen, you have the opportunity to take the focus off of you for extended periods of time. You could take advantage of this to use the restroom, get some coffee or file your nails because they will still be reading when you return to the room. It may take some effort, however, to bring the focus back to you, but it can be done. Visual clutter also has another unintended result—loss of credibility. Think of the best presenters you've ever seen and the visual aids they've used. Earlier this year Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager* and other books, treated the several thousand atten-

dees of TRAINING '98 to a unique keynote address. He broke all the presentation rules. He paced fervently during his 30-minute talk and only used four small stuffed animals that were tucked away in his pocket to illustrate his message. He captured the hearts and minds of every attendee, illustrating that it takes very little visual support to tell a product or service story that conveys our personal passion.

We often fill our screens because of our fear of looking at and interacting with those who have come to listen. Our inability to crisply organize information does a disservice to our audiences. What could have made a decent detailed handout has made it to the big screen. (Start polishing up the ol' boat!)

4. Add as many animations and sound effects as you can.

This diversion tactic is a proven way to take the audience's attention away from key messages and place it squarely on our prowess in getting the most out of the software. By concentrating on just this single area you may be able to reduce even good content in a professional business presentation into a circus sideshow. The gratuitous use of sound to punctuate anything that moves is a powerful tool; it might even irritate your audience to the point of a mass exodus. Don't let their initial chuckles fool you. These effects will soon grate on everyone's nerves.

As you have already discovered, all these steps are interrelated. The more stuff you can make move onscreen, especially if there's absolutely no point to the movement, means you spend less time actually working on your presentation's content (Step 1), and draws attention away from the fact that your presentation lacks any real graphical impact (Step 2).

You see, it's really very easy to coordinate a complete professional meltdown. The real challenge is for those poor slob who actually want to move ahead in their careers. ■



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If disaster strikes onstage, stay focused and be creative

My palms were sweating, my heart was pounding. I could only watch in horror as, one by one, the audience members focused on the proverbial train wreck behind me. I was at the podium in my trade show booth, demonstrating a projector. I was supposed to be extolling the virtues of good, creative content; my colleague, Tom Mucciolo (a nationally recognized delivery-skills coach), was at the other podium, pretending to be a customer. We were in front of our third live audience of the day, doing a five-minute pitch that had gone flawlessly the first two times. Now it had happened: In the middle of the embedded video, the computer locked up tight. The big screen behind me froze. My frantic mouse-clicks were futile. Once again, the fickle gods of technology had chosen the most embarrassing moment to amuse themselves.

Now what?

It's an odds game. If you present enough, sooner or later something unexpectedly bad will happen. And part of being a creative presenter is learning how to gracefully get out of extremely tight spots — ones that may or may not be your fault. When the presentation odds catch up with you, whether it's the laptop, the projector, the sound system or the lighting, you should be prepared. With a little pre-emptive planning, you can minimize even the worst presentation disasters. So let's take on the nightmares one at a time here.

Disaster No. 1:

Locked up stone cold

The laptop froze solid without any warning. I mean *solid* — nothing, not even a mouse. All I got was that cold, hard look a computer screen gives you when it's just exercised the ultimate power play.

Behind me, the large projected image was telling the Infocomm audience that something was very, very wrong. Seconds suddenly felt like hours.

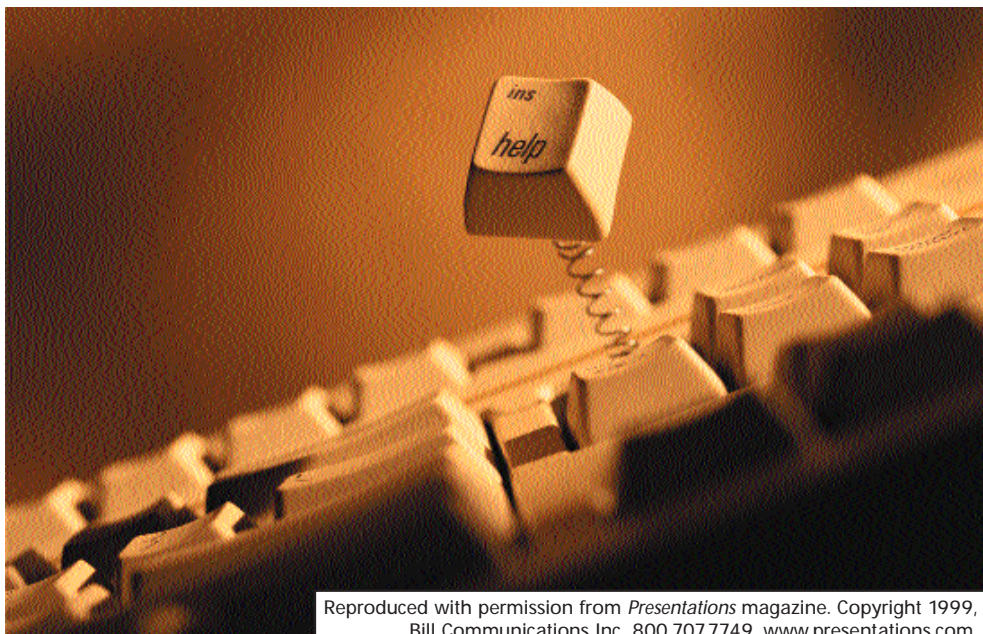
Fortunately, Tom turned out to be a master improviser. He carried on the conversation for both of us for the next few minutes while I completely rebooted the computer. Thanks to some quick thinking on Tom's part, a disaster was averted.

Of course, it would have been even better if the computer had done what it was supposed to from the beginning.

To lessen the chances of your computer locking up like this, there are a couple of things you can do ahead of time:

■ Jog your computer's memory.

Lack of computer memory is one of the primary reasons for lockup. Maybe you figured that if your laptop came with 32MB of RAM, then that's what it's supposed to



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have. Wrong! Manufacturers typically ship these computers with a minimum of memory, hoping to make money on the add-ons. Today, 32MB just isn't adequate for presentation graphics running in a Windows environment. So even if you don't add another thing to your computer, it's essential that you boost the memory — to 64MB at the minimum, and preferably to 96MB. The extra \$250 or so it will cost you is pretty cheap disaster insurance.

■ **Reboot before you present.**

Just before the presentation, turn your computer off, wait 20 seconds or so, then turn it back on again. This reboot purges the computer's memory and makes sure you have open only the specific application needed to drive your presentation. With Windows, it's better to start fresh. This is true even if all you've done recently is run through your presentation a few times and made a couple of changes. When I run a heavy music-and-animation sequence in PowerPoint four or five times, I often find that the music and the graphics get slightly out of sync. A reboot fixes the problem before it happens.

■ **Lower your screen resolution.**

To hear presenters talk these days, higher-resolution laptops and projectors have brought nothing but advantages to the presenter. And it's true that for detailed content such as spreadsheets or small illustrations, high resolution is a necessity. But what you don't hear is that, in most laptops, higher resolution brings a performance trade-off. When your laptop is working to refresh considerably more pixels onscreen, you're going to see your animation slow down noticeably over 60 seconds. If you drop your screen resolution to 800 x 600, on the other

hand, you'll find that animation and music refresh much more quickly. This is something to consider when you buy a laptop as well. If you find you have to trade off color depth for high resolution — if you have to choose between 16-bit color and 1,024 x 768 resolution — you might be better off settling for the high color. For most presentations, 800 x 600 resolution is quite adequate. And 65,500 colors (which is what a 16-bit screen display offers) gives you a lot of impact.

**Disaster No. 2:
The infrared that failed**

I believe in transparent technology, because my presentation is about the message, not my equipment. If they made a Stealth projector, I'd buy it. That desire to make technology an unconscious part of my presentation is why I use a remote pointing device that goes through my projector. But that's also why, after this particular disaster, I make sure to run through a presentation in the actual room where I'll be delivering it, not just in the privacy of my office.

On this occasion, I opened up with some audience interaction, then stepped back and pushed the button on my remote mouse to move the cursor. The cursor jumped to the opposite side of the screen and froze. I frantically pushed and rolled and clicked; the mouse jumped again, but in a completely random direction. So much for transparent technology. The audience began to snicker; I laughed nervously.

Finally, I gave up and anchored myself behind my computer, where I stayed for the rest of the presentation.

What had happened? It turns out that infrared pointing devices in a room lit by fluorescent lights are apt to develop a mind of their own. (No, replacing the batteries doesn't help.) A practice run-through in the actual room will detect this embarrassing little quirk, giving you time to arrange an alternative plan.

**Pay no attention to
the man behind the curtain**

Audiences always want you to deliver the world's best presentation. They're happy when you're successful — and they share your intense pain when things don't go well. So you simply can't deliver a good presentation, no matter how strong your content, when you are preoccupied with all the things that might go wrong. When disaster strikes, whether it's technical, creative or circumstantial, quickly turn it to your advantage: Take a moment to put your audience at ease, then press on. It takes a strong will to forge ahead in the face of unexpected adversity, but your audience will appreciate your candor and courage.

It's tempting, of course, to simply try to bull your way to the end of the presentation. Unfortunately, although you'll probably finish the marathon in one piece, your audience will be exhausted.

Once, when I was delivering a seminar on presentation design techniques, I found a problem with my extensively hyperlinked PowerPoint presentation. After it jumped out to a link, the re-entry was erratic. Sometimes it came back out of the SHOW mode, but sometimes back to screen No. 1. Much to my dismay, I had to scroll through the entire presentation in front of the audience to get back to the correct screen. The first time this happened, I stopped and reminded my audience of that pivotal scene in the movie "The Wizard of Oz" — the one where Toto pulls back the curtain and reveals the Wizard pulling the levers that make "The Great and Mighty Oz" come to life. Then I walked the audience through the hyperlinking process, emphasizing what types of issues they might need to address — as I had just found out. This impromptu side lecture was warmly received. We were able to move on with a sense that none of us are impervious to the unexpected.

I don't want to give you the impression that it was easy, though. I was sweating bullets the whole time. ■

We want to hear from you

Creativity in presentations takes many forms these days, from well-crafted presentation graphics that tell a compelling story, to more effective use of software tools, to turning adversity into opportunity. One thing's for sure: It looks a little different for each of us.

What types of "creative techniques" information would be of most value to you? What creative ideas could you put to use right away? You can go to www.presentations.com/creative to send your questions and ideas. We look forward to hearing from you.